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ABSTRACT

The rapid rise in the numbers of degreed and certificated diploma holders since independence, coupled with a lack of job opportunities in the areas for which these persons have been trained, have led to unemployment and underemployment of educated persons in Francophone West Africa. Suggested solutions include but are not limited to secondary and postsecondary education offering better career counseling based on the demands of the job market; improving manpower planning and forecasting techniques; and assisting efforts to develop the rural sectors of the economy by training and retraining labor to meet the occupational needs of these sectors. (JAM)

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THE DIPLOMA DISEASE AND UNEMPLOYMENT IN FRANCOPHONE WEST AFRICA

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In Francophone West Africa, basic education has no professional content or aim and is a stage towards secondary education. General secondary and higher education provide a preparation for jobs in the administration and the urban modern sector of the economy. Given the very low increase of needs in the modern sector and in the adminstration which is the main employer of diploma holders, the rapid expansion of educational system in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal and Togo and elsewhere in Francophone West Africa necessarily had to lead to unemployment. The present study tries to establish a diagnosis of the diploma disease in relation to the educated unemployed and suggests solutions aimed at easing the syndrome.

INTRODUCTION

After independence, education passed throug a period of euphoria, particularly in Africa. An almost blind faith in the capacity of school to allow everyone access to both the alien culture and the knowledge required to partake effectively in economic development had resulted in an exceptional financial effort in favour of education and countries increased the public resources allocated to that sector by approximately 11 % per anum between 1960 and 1965. The increase remained high later on but the effort has seemed to slow down since 1975. This slowing down has coincided with a profound change in the tone of the debates on education. Doubt has replaced euphoria, at least as far as the capacity of the existing educational systems to reach the objectives assigned to education in development is concerned. Those doubts regularly expressed in Africa as "diploma disease or syndrome" is generally defined as the seeking of a diploma as a passport to employment in the modern sector of the economy or administration without taking into account the content and situation of the labour market (OXENHAM, 1984). The four target Francophone West Afican countries (1) concerned by this survey tend to spend more on education than the others and to preserve this "preference" for education across time even after the setbacks of economic crisis. Yet, a more profound comparative study shows that these countries present big differences between each other : they are of unequal size ; they have varying degrees of resources ; they are not at the same stage of development ; they have different teaching traditions and a different past. Although criticisms and doubts concerning the educational system, tend to develop everywhere, they do not always derive from the same causes. This resulting detailed study tries to : 1°) - establish a diagnosis of the educational and the productive systems and on the relationship between them. 2°) - Look more closely at the "diploma disease" in relation to the unemployment of diploma holders. 3°) - Suggest solutions that will guide decision makers.

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(1) - The countries are : Senegal, Togo, Benin and Côte-d'Ivoire.

I/ THE EDUCATIONAL AND PRODUCTIVE SYSTEMS : EVOLUTION AND RELATIONSHIP

The structure of the educational systems varies little from one country to another and is strongly influenced by France. But since independence, the educational system in each of the target countries has developed in a spectacular way for example : (1) The rapid increase in enrollment ; (2) The low internal output of the system ; (3) The severe imbalance between general and professional or technical education ; (4) The persistent domination of arts departments over scientific ones ; (5) The near absence of appropriate agricultural training and research.

At secondary level, technical training in three of the four countries represents well below 1/10 of the total number of pupils in general education. Only Côte-d'Ivoire presents a less unbalanced picture but the ratio is still inferior to a quarter. Côte-d'Ivoire continues to make a considerable effort to sharply increase flexibility in relation to the GNP whereas Togo has made an even greater one and has remained constant in its efforts. Benin, on the other hand, has stabilized its effort at a little below 5 % of the GNP. Lastly, Senegal has increased its effort slightly since 1977, but is found well below the three others. There exist enormous differences in absolute figures. Thus, Côte-d'Ivoire with a population of school age about 1½ times that of Senegal, spends ten times more on education. Another common characteristic of education budgets is the high level of the funds allocated to help students and the low level allocated for recurrent management expenses other than salaries and scholarships, as well as their relative decrease during the last ten years. The latter should be considered in relation to two other observations : on the one hand, one sees an almost general deterioration in the standard of education seemingly reflecting a lowering of the quality of teaching ; on the other hand, there is a fall in the success rate in examinations. This fall is visible in the four countries and at all levels of the educational system. Inequality is another common characteristic observed in the educational system of the four countries studied. This inequality takes multiple

forms : (1) The very unequal access of children from different social groups to the higher levels of schooling ; (2) The geographic inequality which originates partly from colinization. Nevertheless if the rates of school attendance remain lower in rural zones, it is due partly to the high cost of schooling per pupil and partly to the reluctance of parents in agricultural areas to send their children to school. A considerable effort has been made in Togo where nearly half of the increase of the total number of pupils is due to the improvement of school facilities in disadvantaged regions and for disavantaged groups. (3) Another inequality concerns the sexes. Girls everywhere are educated in fewer numbers than boys. But there again, the increase is favorable to them even if the difference remains considerable. (4) The development of private schools constitutes another trait common to the four countries. In Benin like elsewhere there is a predominance of private commercial and technical schools. This development answers a need and constitutes a means to escape the process of selection operating in public education. Observation of the education systems in the four countries thus shows a series of convergences such as the explosive increase of the number of pupils and the number of university degree holders which is increasing rapidly.

The productive systems of the four countries may still be considered agricultural. Agriculture employs more than 2/3 of the active population : 68 % in Côte-d'Ivoire, the most "modern" of the group and 84 % in Togo. However, it is a type of agriculture that employs very few wage earners and which remains essentially traditional. The modern sector of the economy is very small. It employs a small fraction of man power in all four countries, even though its size may vary from one country to another : 13 % in Côte-d'Ivoire, less than 4 % in Benin. Administration occupies an important place since it accounts for approximately 45 % of man power in the modern sector in three countries out of four. Côte-d'Ivoire distinguishes itself with only 20 %. This modern sector is concentrated in the main towns and above all in the capital where nearly all the members of liberal professions are found. Remuneration in these professions is high compared to the average income and the range of salaries is wide. Between agriculture and the structured modern sector, there exists in all these countries a non-structured

sector which is small in rural zones, but accounts for the majority of urban jobs. This non structured urban sector comprises two categories of activities : traditional activities of arts, crafts and trade and service activities which are much closer to the modern sector.

This modern non structured sector contributes therefore to the activity of the modern sector and often requires some kind of qualifications from employees. Though the preceding trend can be found in varying dress in the four countries, there is at least one structural aspect of the productive system where the differences are very pronounced. It is the relationship between public and private sectors. Benin has in fact nationalized most of the major private enterprises while Côte-d'Ivoire has been following the reverse route by handing over to private control a series of national enterprises. The existence of a more or less important para-statal sector in each of the countries but whose exact status varies from one to the other is another problem although significant differences are observed in the salary policies of those various sectors. There is more difference in their recruitment and promotion policies. Indeed, everywhere the administration and to a limited extent the public enterprises use a scale of salaries that is closely linked to the level of training of job seekers and employees, so that the diploma determines very directly the level of recruitment and promotion prospects.

In the public sector, the diploma is the necessary and sufficient condition for employment at a certain level whereas in the private sector it is a necessary but insufficient condition. Promotion is often quicker in the private sector but occurs in relation to the individual's revealed aptitudes. These observations show an imbalance, at least a potential one, between the supply and demand of diploma holders. However the situation differs from one country to another and is more complex.

II/ UNEMPLOYMENT OF DIPLOMA HOLDERS AND THE DIPLOMA DISEASE

The unemployment of diploma holders is often seen as a new but significant phenomenon in developing countries. It is considered as the main symptom of the non adaptation of school to the needs of the economy (IRIZZARY, 1980). It is not easy to quantify the unemployment of diploma holders with precision. The flux in supply and demand as recorded by employment centers considerably underestimates the phenomenon, especially for diploma holders of university level thus making it difficult, in general, to measure the duration of unemployment is a phenomenon which tends to become worrying in all four countries, but diploma holders and especially those from higher education are affected more than others. (2) The level of employment in administration is declining except in the teaching field where it is still high in some countries. (3) There exists a marked lack of adjustment between supply and demand in the field of unemployment. The people looking for work prefer administrative jobs where the needs appear to be more or less saturated while there exist shortages elsewhere, particulary for some jobs in the technical and social sectors. (4) The estimates show an aggravation of the imbalance both quantitatively and qualitatively.

It appears, therefore, that unemployment of diploma holders at present is a serious phenomenon quantitatively. Given the very low increase of needs in the modern sector which in the main employer of a good number of diploma holders, the rapid expansion of the educational system necessarily had to lead to unemployment. Unemployment among diploma holders is not only caused by a bad educational planning. It is the insufficient development of the modern sector of the economy which for the most part is responsible for the unemployment of diploma holders. Thus, the remedy is to be found more in the productive than in the educational system (CARNOY, 1980). Secondly, it is mainly because of lack of jobs that diploma holders are not recruited and not because they are considered unfit to hold existing jobs. The phenomenon of diploma devaluation already visible in some countries and for certain types of training, will probably increase and will provoke an accentuation

of unemployment among less qualified people. The demand for education is increasing very rapidly while job prospects seem to be drying up. At the same time, and in an even more paradoxical way, more an more young people appear to be seeking diplomas for diploma's sake without much concern about the course and they exert pressure for the exams to become easier but not or the syllabus to be better adapted to their needs.

In all four countries, (1) the modern sector of the economy is the one where salaries are by far the highest, where job security is greater, where the correspondence between knowledge, aptitudes and attitudes acquired at school and the employer's requirements is best. This sector recruits according to almost exclusively scholastic criteria. This is true not only of administration which uses qualification scales with a strict correspondence to the levels of training, but also in enterprises whether these are public, para-statal or private. This sector is very reduced, does not develop very rapidly and even tends to slow down when the adminsitrations have reached their bottom line. (2) Public authorities have made a big effort in favor of education and in the reduction of inequalities in education ; (3) No sustained coherent and massive effort has been undertaken to modernize and transform subsistence agriculture which was the activity of the great majority of the population. The consequences of this state of affairs were a formidable drive to studies and particularly to their long continuation, in general education after basic schooling ; and a drive for children from peasant families to leave farming and seek higher income and more leisure activities in the towns.

The failure of mesures intended to combat this imbalance and in particular to stop the expansion of long general and university education was equally predictable.

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As long as the diploma remains the necessary and almost sufficient condition for access to good and well paid jobs, as long as unemployment primarily affects those who are less trained, as long as agriculture remains a hard job allowing farmers to just subsist, we will continue to witness a rush for school. The pressure will be such that reforms will be ineffective and will not in any case be applied with rigour.

The demand for basic education is a good thing. Its only negative effects stem from the fact that primary education has no professional content or aim and is only considered as a stage towards secondary education which is geared towards providing for the needs of the urban modern sector. It does not prepare the children of farmers for rural activities and by conveying urban culture, it incites them to leave field work. It is organized in such a manner as to eliminate a large number of children. Those who quite during primary schooling or have to stop at the end of this cycle feel excluded.

General secondary education provides a good preparation for medium level jobs in the administration and for jobs in the productive sector. The same thing applies for executive jobs in the case of law and economic courses at university. The only real danger resides in the deterioration of the conditions in which education is given as the financial and human resources fail keep up with the number of students.

III/ REMEDIAL MEASURES

In the short term, it is not possible to create jobs in sufficient numbers for all diploma holders. In the short and even middle term, it is neither possible nor advisable to considerably reduce the output from the educational system. The decisions in favour of universal schooling common to all four countries, will prevent any voluntary attempt at lowering the rates of schooling in the primary sector. On the contrary, it is probable that efforts will be made to improve them. It will almost certainly be impossible to reduce in any significant way the

proportion of those eligible to pursue their studies after basic education. This means that in absolute figures the number of pupils in lower secondary education will never decrease. For the same reasons, it is difficult to envisage a decrease of the number of university students, all subjects included. The overall disequilibrium thus cannot rapidly disappear although attempts can be made at preventing it from increasing too much and correcting certain sector-based imbalances. Certain measures, some of which are already in application or contemplated in one or more of the countries concerned, can contribute to this shift. Only a though examination of the phenomena will allow a full appreciation of them and eventually reveal their causes. The functioning of the job market must be studied with sufficient precision. The observation devices in operation at present and what it is desirable to accelerate and/or to generalize are : (1) Observation of changes in job supply and demand ; (2) Manpower planning and forecasting ; (3) Better appreciation of the extent and the nature of unemployment among diploma holders. Studies of students' professional advancement already undertaken in Côte-d'Ivoire or envisaged in Senegal are indispensable and should be generalised. (4) Better students' guidance and advising ; (5) Before developing technical training in great numbers particulary in the secondary sector, it is necessary to better evaluate to potential needs. The experiment conducted in common by Senegal and Côte-d'Ivoire in cooperation with the French Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur les Qualifications (Center for Studies and Research on Qualifications) is to be examined closely.

To guide profound reforms of basic education and of adult training, it is necessary to evaluate training destined to improve the productivity of farmers, in the countries concerned as well as elsewhere and this must be conducted with the utmost care. The same thing applies in the case of productive schools experimented in Benin and envisaged in Togo. The lessons of reforms already implemented should at present allow a better understanding of the conditions and limits of such an

attempt. Lastly, we would like to suggest that the parallels between structural problems faced by education in the four countries and elsewhere in Francophone Africa and those of the French Educational System are too numerous and should lead to the examination of the influence of the colonial past, and even of the mentalities of the people involved.

Of course, it is desirable for the modern sector to be prosperous, to develop itself and to create jobs but the policy of industrial development is outside the scope of this report. Nevertheless, we can point out once again what national studies have shown more or less clearly that the policy of creating giant industrial units with highly sophisticated technology, generates few qualified jobs in general, since the managerial staff generally come from the country that masters the technology in question and is building the unit. A policy for the creation of medium sized units using less costly methods, would help absord diploma holders in better conditions. The informal sector and in particular, arts ad crafts needs help in order to modernize itself. Action aiming at popularizing technical knowledge in craft industry which is being taken in Côte-d'Ivoire should be followed. The institution in Togo of a system of assistance for the creation of small and medium size enterprises for the manufasturing of simple yet useful products for development, but which at present continue to be imported appears to be even more interesting. It would therefore be important for necessary finances to be rapidly made available and for results to be observed by the other countries. Agriculture is abviously the sector where more emphasis should be laid. The most interesting initiatives in this sector are those destined to facilitate the settlement of youths in rural areas as planned in Côte-d'Ivoire and TOGO as well as projects for collective exploitation of resources. But it is in the field of education that actions are more numerous and can in the short term have more direct effects on the easing of the diploma disease.

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Higher education per student is very expensive due to orientation which is not always optimal, training which is not always adapted to professional needs and students who are not always motivated. No important reforms are under way at this level, but they are often discussed. Let's remind ourselves here, in very strong terms, what has already been underlined in many reports. A reduction of student number and a better orientation are inseparable from a reform of the system of scholarships. The amount of the latter should be determined in relation to the resources of parents and the subject chosen. The automatic link between admission to higher education and the award of a study grant should be broken.

One could try to combat the lack of teachers in scientific disciplines by motivating people financially as is beginning to be done in Côte-d'Ivoire. It is necessary to develop short training, diversified, adapted to needs, valid for school leavers from basic education who do not want or cannot pursue long studies, as well as for those already in work. A project in this respect is being developed in Togo, another one is already operating with the mobile training units in Côte-d'Ivoire. An evaluation of these initiatives is indispensable in order to compare them to practical middle education. Apprenticeship should be revised through a consensus between the state and the bosses so that the cost is not born entirely by the apprentices and to help the modernization of this sector. Primary education poses other problems, harder to solve because of financial constraints. It is indead necessary to make it really universal and to renovate it so that it would be more in contact with local realities and to complement it with professional training. The measures that have preavailed until now have not yielded entirely satisfactory results, most often, because they were very

ambitious and because resources to match those ambitions were not mobilized. It is necessary to emphasise the fact that the deterioration of the quality of primary education, due to lack of means, is a reality. The choice in favor of quantity, that is the lenghthing of the compulsory cycle, could only reinforce this tendency and affect the higher levels. Lastly a better control of the recruitment modes and the quality of education in private schools are two measures which would appear to be indispensable.

CONCLUSION

Unemployment among diploma holders is likely to develop very rapidly in Francophone West Africa. Moreover, it only constitutes one of many manifestations of the diploma disease which in itself is a sign of fundamental imbalance withim the productive and the educational systems which could be correcte only progressively. However, many of the reforms under way in the four countries observed can contribute to an improvement.

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